

Lisbon as a Nautical Events Destination: A New Leisure and Tourism Attraction



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The consequence of its geographical position the city of Lisbon has developed a close relationship with the river (Tagus river) and the sea (Atlantic Ocean). Portugal was one of the pioneering nations in the Sea Discoveries (intensive maritime exploration mainly during the 15th century). Lisbon was the port of departure for these adventures. This fact early conditioned the relationship of the city with the river and the sea, and organized the city waterfront as a space mostly devoted to economic activity and commercial trading. With the development of tourism in Europe, Portugal has established itself as a major European destination and Lisbon, as result of its historical heritage, an important city-break destination. In this conversion process Lisbon has reinvented its relationship with the river. The waterfront has been taken as a strategic point of tourism attraction and development. In this context, nautical tourism has assumed particular prominence, both as a tourism product, and also associated with major international yachting events which have put Lisbon in world news.

Keywords tourism destination; tourism development; nautical tourism

Introduction

The alternative tourism has been gaining an increasing role in the promotion and territorial marketing, working as a differentiating factor in the context of tourism. The nautical tourism emerges within this concept as a tool for the development of coastal areas (both in recreational and sports dimensions) either as cruise tourism destination or as a mean for international events.

The infrastructures development process within these waterfront areas as well as the strategic promotion of nautical events, transformed, in the last ten years, the city of Lisbon, allowing the Tagus River waterfront return back to citizens and making it one of the most important and attractive places for leisure, tourism and nautical events.

The touristic and economic dimensions as well as the international projection (aesthetic-culture) of Lisbon are directly and widely benefited with the promotion of nautical activities, bringing Portugal's capital to the top of European Destinations.

Lisbon and the Sea: A Historical Relation

Built on the banks of the river Tagus,¹ the most important river of the Iberian Peninsula, and surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean, the city of Lisbon was once famous worldwide alongside cities like Rotterdam and Antwerp, as one of the most important maritime and trading posts and as the European gateway for all maritime traffic from Asia, Africa and the American continent.

Nevertheless, the decline of the Portuguese maritime-commercial empire, in the late 15th century, the violent earthquake in 1755 which destroyed a substantial part of the city, and the characteristics of a prolonged dictatorship in the 20th century, gradually drew visitors away and refrained the international recognition of a city filled with valuable historical heritage as well as significant beauty.

Out of the flow of the international grand tour,² especially due to the peripheral geographical condition of Portugal within Europe, it was very difficult to put Lisbon on the map and show the world the importance of Lisbon and its profound connection to the river Tagus. During the 20th century it happened only on rare occasions.

The alleged neutrality of the country during the Second World War, turned the city and its west coast³ into a privileged scenario for spying and counter-intelligence services, at which point a considerable number of British and German secret agents roamed hotels in the area, on espionage missions.

Earlier, in the late 30s, the Spanish Republic and the Civil War, brought to these same places a considerable number of refugees. Soon after, in the early 40s, the air-bridge between Europe and the United States, with its

¹ The Tagus estuary is the largest in Europe, with about 34.000 hectares, and a sanctuary for fish, mollusks, crustaceans and especially for birds that stop here during their migration between northern Europe and Africa, as it is one of the most important wetlands in Europe.

² Initial phase of tourist demand, 18th and 19th centuries.

³ The seaside towns of Estoril and Cascais (Portuguese Riviera) are located just a few kilometers from Lisbon and concentrated a great number of foreigners between the 30s and 40s in the 20th century.

base in the hydro-port of the Tagus, made it possible for thousands of refugees to escape Nazi persecution, fleeing to America through Lisbon.

More recently, in the second half of the 20th century, as a consequence of the Israeli-Arab political and military crisis (shut down of the Suez Canal) and benefiting from its extraordinary geo-strategic position, Lisbon started receiving the new supertankers which were forced to resume to the dangerous and slow Cape Route and which needed to stop in the Tagus shipyards for repairs and renovations.

Though this fact did increase the nautical and commercial aspect of the city and its harbor, and raised the Portuguese naval and metal industry to a worldwide position, it also had a strong negative impact not just on the environmental quality of the river Tagus, but also on the relationship between Lisbon inhabitants and the river. For decades, the access to most of the 19 km of the northern riverside and almost all the southern riverside was forbidden to the population and was used only for docking, ship repair, oil pipeline and loading and unloading terminals.

Lisbon as a Tourism Destination: Nautical Tourism as Part of the Tipping-Point Strategy

The truth is that the city, despite its strong and historical connection to the sea, slowly turned its back on the riverside and the people from Lisbon abandoned all leisure and sport activities associated with it. The environmental conditions were dreadful. They fostered the large-scale estrangement of the population, as well as any efforts to restore the riverfront as one of the main attractions of the city.

The situation began to change in 1994. There was a turning point, *tipping-point strategy* (Gladwell, 2000) with the winning bidding of Lisbon to hold the World Expo (EXPO 98) which was focused on the Ocean and its preservation and the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Portuguese arrival in India (1498) and the opening of the sea route between East and West through the Atlantic route.

The EXPO 98 led to a huge effort of urban rehabilitation of the eastern riverside and the requalification of an area that was highly degraded because of the location of a landfill and some of the major heavy and polluting industries of the city (refinery, processing and storage of fossil fuels). The renovation of the eastern area of Lisbon, initiated in 1998 with the transformation of an obsolete industrial park into a leisure, service and housing area, allowed not only to provide a number of cultural, leisure

and sports infrastructures,⁴ but also to undertake other necessary environmental improvements of the river and its tributaries⁵ which continued in the following years.

Although the EXPO 98 worked effectively as an ignition factor of the entire process of urban and tourist change and requalification of the city of Lisbon, it is also important to add three other factors of major importance, in order to understand the current tourism performance of Lisbon⁶ and the importance that the river Tagus and the sea have in this process.

1. A clear ideological return to the Sea, as a source of economic development of the country⁷ (Pitta e Cunha, 2011), enhancing not only the geo-strategic aspect of the country, but also the implementation of a strategic development plan for the Sea, focused on the promotion of the blue economy (SaeR, 2009) and the rising of new strategic products associated to tourism, sports, scientific development and alternative energy resources.
2. A clear commitment on the part of the Town Council to give the riverside back to the people of Lisbon within the years 2011–2014 (Associação de Turismo de Lisboa, 2011), strongly focusing on the relationship of the Sea as a unique element in the value chain of Lisbon's supply as a tourist destination. In this framework it was especially important to re-qualify the riverside of Lisbon,⁸ construct a cruise terminal, change the location of the container terminal (parking, loading and unloading of containers) and improve the eight harbors between Cascais in the west and Parque das Nações to the east of Lisbon, for recreational, sport, tourism and business purposes. Lisbon has a high potential in this context and appears as an impor-

⁴ Oceanarium, multipurpose pavilion, museums, theaters, hotels and marinas.

⁵ Dredging and toxic substances removal, construction of water treatment plants, construction and enlargement of the cruise pier and transference of the container terminal to another area.

⁶ Ranked as one of the most beautiful cities of the world, alongside Venice, Paris and Prague, and the most attractive tourism destination for European and Americans in 2012/2013, Lisbon has had, according to the Observatório de Turismo de Lisboa, 5 million foreign tourists in the year 2012.

⁷ Portugal is the EU country with the largest exclusive economic zone which may be extend to over 2.000.000 km² with the probable amendment proposed by the task group of the extension of the continental shelf.

⁸ Pedestrian zones along the northern river bank, cycle lanes, gardens and public leisure spaces, urban sports facilities and restaurant and hotel infrastructures.

tant destination for nautical tourism: ‘The region of Lisbon covers an extensive sea area [...] where there is a supply of infrastructures and natural conditions for water sports – such as surf, sailing, fishing, diving, etc. – and for water-tourism activities’ (Associação de Turismo de Lisboa, 2011).

3. As mentioned above, the influx of cruises in the river Tagus has highly increased in the past few years. According to the APL⁹ the number of passengers had an average annual variation of 14% in a period of five years (2006–2011), from 270 thousand to over 502,000. The number of port calls had an average annual growth of 4%, from 269 in 2006 to 33 in 2011. With results like these, the port of Lisbon positioned itself on the second place of the Cruise Europe European ports ranking (this association gathers over 100 harbors of the Europe and Northern Europe Atlantic ports, and Lisbon is surpassed only by Copenhagen).
4. Finally, the compromising strategy regarding the market of major water sports events as a factor for economic promotion and spreading of tourism potential (Getz, 1991) in Lisbon, began with the bidding for America’s Cup 2007 and even though it was lost to Valencia (in Spain), it ignited a number of large-scale international events which have been of the uttermost importance for the projection of Lisbon as a nautical tourism destination.

The renowned quality of the estuary of the river Tagus and the coast of Estoril for sailing competitions has allowed to conduct the ISAF Sailing World Championship in 2007, one of the qualifying rounds of all sailing categories for the Olympics. The European leg of the America’s Cup World Series took place in Cascais in 2011, and in 2012 the first European stopover and first European leg of the Volvo Ocean Race in the estuary of the Tagus.¹⁰

According to the consultant firm PriceWaterhouseCoopers Portugal, the 2012 edition of the Volvo Ocean Race represented ‘an economic impact of 29 to 34 million Euros and a direct economic effect of 16.4 million Euros.’ When arriving to Lisbon the VOR website recorded more than 7 million viewers and over 200.000 people visited the Race Tracker.

The famous Tall Ships’ Race had a stopover and a regatta in 2012, also in the Tagus estuary, and some rounds of the World Match Racing Sailing

⁹ APL – Administração do Porto de Lisboa (Lisbon Port Administration).

¹⁰ Lisbon will once more hold a new leg of the Volvo Ocean Race in 2015.

Tour have come through Lisbon. The latest was La Route des Princes, in June 2013.

As for surf, the region of Lisbon has hosted some of the major events of the World Tour Championship (WTC) and World Qualifying Series (WQS). Moreover for the first time outside Hawaii, a Triple Crown Race will be held in Portugal in September, of which two of its rounds will be held in the western coast of Lisbon (Carcavelos).

One of the rounds of the Rip Curl Pro Portugal category in 2012 generated 7.8 million Euros in direct revenue and attracted 130,000 people to the event at the Supertubos beach in Peniche, thus expanding the tourist season out of its usual period and increasing tourism revenues on a local level. This event had more than five million viewers on the Internet and over 45 million on TV broadcasts.

All these water sports events have increased the prestige of the tourism of Lisbon. They represent a significant contribution for the tourist promotion of the city and help develop the local economic fabric and stimulate the creation of new tourism products in the sector. The growth of water sports tourism activities has fostered the increase of offer and supply of water sports activities and thus leading to the growth of clubs and enthusiasts, in a snowball effect that brings more events to Lisbon and increases tourist demand.

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